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ABSTRACT

Student progress, in terms of achievement gain, in reading, language, and spelling was studied for students in these elementary reading programs in the Los Angeles Unified School District: Open Court, Collections for Young Scholars, High Achievement/Waiver Schools, and Success for All. The study included only second graders with at least 1 year of exposure to all of these reading programs and 2 consecutive years of standardized achievement data, resulting in samples of 48,132 students with Stanford 9 reading data, 50,611 with language data, and 52,473 with spelling data. Simple gain score (posttest-pretest) was used as the measure of student progress. The study sample was divided into low, medium, and high performance groups. To control for the impact of school characteristics, these students schools were also classified into low, medium, and high scorers on the School Characteristics Index (SCI), a school background ranking index. Two analyses were performed, one containing retained students and the other excluding retained students. Results show that the Open Court and Collections for Young Scholars programs had the most significant impact on reading achievement of low performing students. All the reading programs had a significant impact on low performing students reading achievement even after controlling for retained students. None of the programs had an impact on medium and high performing students reading outcomes, and these students actually lost ground. Gains in language for students from schools with medium or high SCI ranks were positive for all reading programs. (SLD)

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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SECOND GRADE STUDENTS READING,
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SCHOOL DISTRICT READING PROGRAMS**

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SECOND GRADE STUDENTS READING, LANGUAGE, AND SPELLING GAIN SCORES FOR THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT READING PROGRAMS

Executive Summary

Purpose

The main objective of this report is to examine student progress (gain) in reading, language, and spelling for the District's elementary reading programs.

Sample

Since most of the reading programs are relatively new at least in some schools, this study included only second grade students, the only grade in LAUSD with at least one year of exposure to all of these reading programs and two consecutive years of standardized achievement data. Simple gain score (posttest-pretest) was used as the measure of student progress. This required selecting only students with two years of data on Stanford 9 reading (N=48,132), language (N=50,611), and spelling (N=52,473) achievement tests.

Methods

Gain scores generally have a negative correlation with pretest data due to regression toward the mean and ceiling or floor effects. This means that we should expect a higher gain for initial low achieving students compared to the initial medium or high achieving students. One way of controlling for this effect is to divide the selected sample into similar initial performance groupings, based on their pretest data. To accomplish this, the study sample is divided into three groups: 1) low performing students (student's pretest score is below 1 standard deviation from the mean); 2) medium performing students (student's pretest score is between +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean); and 3) high performing students (student's pretest score is above 1 standard deviation from the pretest mean).

The School Characteristics Index (SCI) is a school background-ranking index created by the California Department of Education based on a number of school indicators such as percent of English language learners, pupil socioeconomic status, pupil mobility and ethnicity, teacher credentialing, class size, and school calendar. To control for the impact of school characteristics, the sample schools were classified into three categories: 1) low SCI (school rank is below 1 standard deviation of SCI mean); 2) medium SCI (school rank is between +/- 1 standard deviation of SCI mean); and 3) high SCI (school rank is above 1 standard deviation of SCI mean).

Since a significant number of 2nd grade students were retained (n=5661), it was important to account for retention. Therefore, the study analyses were performed for two conditions: one included retained students and the other excluded retained students.

Evaluation Questions

1. How are 2nd grade students with a similar initial performance level achieving in each reading program?
2. How are 2nd grade students from similar school environments performing in each reading program?

Reading Gain by Student Initial Performance

- Low performing students benefited most from the Open Court (OCR) reading program with an average gain of 12.5 and least from Success For All (SFA) with an average reading gain of 7.9 NCE units. Excluding retained students, the OCR average gain dropped to 7.7 and the average gain for SFA decreased to 5.4 NCE points.
- Average reading gains for Collections for Young Scholars (CYS) and OCR reading programs are relatively similar for students with initial low performance levels.
- The average reading gain for low performing students in High Achieving/Waiver Schools with school choice programs was smaller than OCR and CYS averages, but still substantial.
- In all of the reading programs, gain score averages for low performing students were positive and meaningful even after excluding retained students.
- For medium and high performing students (approximately 80% of the sample), the average reading gain was either negative or close to zero (including or excluding retained students).

Language Gain by Student Initial Performance

- When retained students were included, the average language NCE gain for low performing students was about the same for all reading programs (about 7 NCE points) except for SFA, which was about 3.1 NCE points.
- Excluding retained students from the analysis, the average language gain for low performing students becomes either negative or close to zero. This finding highlights the importance of considering retention in the analysis. It also

indicates that none of the reading programs promotes language achievement for non-retained low performing students.

- Medium performing students in High Achiever/Waiver Schools with OCR or CYS have the highest average language gain followed by High Achiever/Waiver schools with school choice programs. The average language gain decreases slightly when retained students are excluded.
- For medium performing students, the average language gain for the SFA program was close to zero regardless of the inclusion or exclusion of retained students.
- For high performing students, the highest average language gain belongs to SFA (3.9 NCE units), followed by High Achiever/Waiver schools using OCR or CYS. For this group of students OCR and CYS language gain were the least, although positive.

Spelling Gain by Student Initial Performance

- Including retained students in the analyses, the average spelling NCE gains for low performing students were about the same for OCR and CYS reading programs (about 12 NCE points). The gain for the SFA reading program was 8.1 NCE points. When retained students were excluded from the analyses, the magnitude of spelling gain decreased but remained statistically significant and educationally meaningful.
- For medium performing students, the average spelling NCE gain was higher for Open Court compared to other reading programs, including or excluding retained students.
- For high performing students, the amount of spelling gain was either negative or close to zero, including or excluding retained students.

Reading Gain by School Characteristics Index

- The Open Court reading program was the only reading program with a noticeable reading gain for low and medium SCI schools. The average reading gain for other reading programs were either negative or close to zero especially when retained students were excluded.
- In high SCI schools, all of the reading programs had a negative or a close to zero average reading gain score with or without retained students.

Language Gain by School Characteristics Index

- In low SCI schools, both OCR and CYS reading programs had positive language gain scores. These averages remained positive even after excluding retained

students. The average gain for SFA program vanishes when retained students are excluded from the analysis.

- All reading programs had a positive language gain for medium and high SCI schools. After excluding retained students, the language gain scores decrease but remain positive for all programs.

Spelling Gain by School Characteristics Index

- Open Court had the highest gain in spelling compared to all other reading programs, including or excluding retained students. The average spelling gain was positive for all reading programs.

Summary of Findings

- Open Court and CYS had the most significant impact on low performing students' reading achievement. All reading programs have a significant impact on low performing students' reading achievement even after excluding retained students.
- None of the reading programs had an impact on medium and high performing students' reading outcomes. Medium and high performing students actually lost ground. One interpretation of this finding is that these programs may be too easy for these students and not challenging enough to motivate them. On the other hand, strong gains in language were evident for the same groups of students in all programs except SFA.
 - High performing students benefited most in reading from SFA. One explanation for this finding may be that SFA has a variety of reading materials more suitable for high performing students. However, it should be noted that SFA is utilized in only a few high performing schools.
- Gains in language for students from schools with medium or high SCI ranks were positive for all reading programs. However, the amount of gain decreased after excluding retained students.

Conclusions

- Students in the Open Court reading program had the highest positive gain especially for low initial performing students. In 25 of the 36 possible analyses, the results for Open Court were positive (more than 1 NCE point) and only in 3 analyses students in Open Court program had a negative gain (less than -1 NCE point).

- Students in the Collections for Young Scholars had the next highest positive results. In 23 of 36 possible analyses the students' gain averages were positive, and in 9 analyses were negative.
- Students in High Achieving/Waiver schools with a school choice reading program had a positive gain in 18 of the 30 possible analyses. However, in 8 analyses (27%) the results were negative.
- Success for All, and High Achieving/Waiver Schools with Open Court produced the least positive results among all reading programs.



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